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*Mr Lawrence Cong Amers*

SPEECH

OF

A. H. LAWRENCE, ESQ.,

AT A

MEETING OF WHIGS

IN

WASHINGTON CITY,

MAY 31st, 1852.

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PRINTED AND CIRCULATED BY THE CENTRAL WEBSTER COMMITTEE.

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## S P E E C H .

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Mr. CHAIRMAN: Very serious alarm is beginning to be felt here as to the course of the Southern Whig party in regard to the nomination and election of President.

It is thought by many of our best and wisest men, (and the opinion is fast gaining ground,) that we are upon the eve of a great political danger, which has not until very recently attracted much notice. A danger which is not the less, but rather the more alarming, that it is not to be seen in any very violent outbreak of popular feeling, nor in any measures of legislative or Executive encroachment, but will rather be felt in the silent and secret alienation of one portion of our Union from the other, and an introduction of sectional rather than national parties, the inevitable result of which will be that *whatever* measures may be hereafter proposed, however offensive or hostile they may be to other than the locality where they originated, however repugnant to existing laws or to the Constitution, or to good faith, *NO MAN will again be found* so reckless of his own quiet, so purely and disinterestedly regardless of all personal considerations, as to stand forth, in opposition to the sentiments of his constituency, in support of the true interests of the whole country. Sir, I fear that the Northern Conservative, Compromise, Webster Whigs, have some apparent reason to complain of their Southern Whig brethren as to the manner in which Mr. Webster has been treated in the meetings and assemblies at the South; and yet I am most happy to believe that the supposed neglect has not arisen from any ungrateful forgetfulness of Mr. Webster's services to the whole country, and especially to the South, or from any want of appreciation of his great abilities, his comprehensive statesmanship, his truly national and conservative and patriotic principles, far less from a disposition to overlook and pass by those excellencies because they were found in a Northern man, but from a mistaken impression that Mr. Webster was hardly considered as an *available* candidate for the Presidency among the Whigs of the North themselves.

I believe that there is no disposition in the South to overlook or depreciate the eminent services of Mr. Webster; that there is felt for his self-sacrificing and patriotic conduct on the compromise a lively and profound respect and gratitude; and that were Mr. Webster placed before them as the nominee of the Whig party he would bring to his support the entire strength of the Whigs of the South. And yet it is nevertheless true, that in almost all the resolutions of Southern meetings for the choice of delegates to the National Convention, whilst the compromise measures as a "*final-*

*ity*” are set forth as the single qualification to be never lost sight of in the choice of a candidate, yet Mr. Webster is rarely mentioned by name. There is apparently, and judging only from the resolutions, a total forgetfulness of Mr. Webster in the disposition to do honor to the present President. Our Northern friends are told, and we believe it to be so, that these resolutions have been framed in compliment to the head of an able and distinguished administration; that they indicate no personal preference; and that in fact Mr. Webster has the fullest and broadest confidence of the Southern Whigs. While we cordially concede to Mr. Fillmore the high praise of having fearlessly done his duty to the Constitution and the country in the hour of danger, we feel that the effect which this apparent neglect is producing on the feelings of the North is perhaps the worst indication of the times. It is to be dreaded and avoided even more than the excitement which preceded the passage of the compromise measures. It will do more to *undo* those measures as a final settlement of the fearful questions then agitated than all the efforts of all the abolitionists and socialists and rhapsodists in the country. It will do more to weaken our faith in the *policy* of patriotism, it will do more to sectionalize parties, it will do more to keep down and repress broad and disinterested views of public affairs, than all the objurgations of fanaticism which have been hurled at the head of the Secretary of State.

Even now it is said that Mr. Webster is, the last statesman of the North, who will ever sacrifice himself in the contests upon the subject of slavery. Even already, we fear that an abatement of feeling has already begun to be felt amongst those who have thus far given check to abolitionism. They say already, if Daniel Webster is not to be trusted by the South, it is in vain to expect hereafter any support to any Northern man. If the services which he has tendered do not entitle *him* to the regard of the whole country, no man can ever look for it in time to come. It was a fearful crisis when the Compromise was under discussion. The danger which was hanging over our country was more imminent than had ever before threatened it. Both parties were contending for extremes. The Union itself was shaking on its very foundations. Good men, intelligent men, patriotic men, were trembling for its safety. Clouds and darkness were hanging over our country; and men's hearts were failing them for fear. In this crisis, the Senator from Massachusetts stood forth, and it is not too much to say that he held the fate of this Union in the palms of his hands. Had *he* given encouragement to the wild spirit of abolitionism, which was raging at the North—had *he* turned the influence of his great intellect and great name against the constitutional rights of the South—or, had *he* made use of that theoretical repugnance to slavery in the abstract, which is general at the North, and fanned it into a consuming fire, the days of this Republic would have been numbered. This is not un-



meaning or groundless assertion. It is susceptible almost of demonstration. Who does not know that it took all of Mr. Webster's great influence at the North to carry with him even his most devoted friends? Who does not know that he has incurred the rancorous hatred of a very considerable portion of the Whig party in the North? Who does not know that Mr. Webster not only *hazarded*, but that for a time, he actually lost that position, *that proud position*, which he had up to that time maintained undisputed in the hearts of the people of Massachusetts; and that the doors of that cradle of liberty, which had been so often the scene of his triumphant displays of eloquence and patriotism, were actually closed against him? *Thank God* he has since been in *Faneuil Hall* "OPEN." Every one knows this that knows any thing of the events which have transpired within the last two years. If then such was the struggle, which was required to maintain the position even of Daniel Webster, in the State of Massachusetts, when taking the stand which he did at the demand of lofty national patriotism, who does not see that the influence of his name, when thrown into the same scale with the sectional feelings of the free States, would have carried them in a body against any measures which looked like a compromise with slavery.

Now, it is not too much to say, that to Daniel Webster more than to any other man belongs the credit of having averted this awful calamity. To him more than to *all* other public men is to be ascribed the check which was given to that dangerous progress of abolitionism in the free States, which would have inevitably brought on all the consequences I have alluded to. For his own personal popularity in his own section of the country, it was a truly hazardous proceeding. But he did not regard his private fortunes in the public cause. He saw that his country was in danger, and he staked his all for that country. At that fearful crisis he knew no North, no South, *nothing but the UNION*. He trusted that future times would do justice to his motives, though the present might cover him with obloquy.

Mr. Chairman, the only mode by which the constitutional rights of the South can ever be preserved, is by the maintenance of a constitutional conservative party in the non-slaveholding States. Of course I am not speaking now of violent and revolutionary measures resorted to in self-defence, against aggressive acts; but of laws regularly passed, and which should not endanger the perpetuity of the Union. I repeat, then, *that the only mode consistently with the safety of the Union by which the constitutional rights of the South will be preserved*, is by the encouragement and maintenance of a *conservative Union party in the free States*. If political abolition should ever become the *prevailing* policy of the free States, it needs no prophet to foretell that aggressive measures would be commenced upon the institution of slavery. It needs no prophet to foretell that such aggressions would be resisted. And that would

be war, civil war. There is no middle course if the North and South are arrayed against each other as a whole upon this subject. There is nothing to restrain the violence of either. But let a conservative party be maintained in the free States themselves, as is the case now, and conservative measures will always be the result. We have seen this in the fearful crisis which has been passed. It will always be so hereafter.

But let me ask, how is a conservative party to be maintained in the North. Is it to sustain itself amidst all the discouragements at the North without any encouragement from the South? Will such a party continue true to the rights of the South, whilst the South shall cast it off as an useless thing as soon as its own purposes are answered? Or can such a party be maintained when its leaders, its great men, its good men, are not trusted, are not met with that cordial greeting, are not honored and supported as they ought to be? It is reasoning against the whole current of human feeling and human conduct to believe it. Those great leaders, those patriotic statesmen might continue firm in the cause they had espoused; but their followers would fall off in mortification and disgust. There would be no conservative party. Every man who knows Mr. Webster knows that *he* would remain steadfast to the principles on which he has acted, if every man in the country should desert him. *He* could "take no step backward." *He* would remain true to the Constitution of the United States by the necessity of his nature. *He* could not adopt an unconstitutional course until the laws of intellect should be changed. But for the *very reason* of his greatness and his unchangeable firmness would not his friends be the more touched by the neglect to pay the tribute due to those qualities?

Now suppose that Mr. Webster, after the peculiar services which he has rendered in this matter, and after the particular resentments which he has incurred "in the house of his friends." Should now—when his steadfast followers there, those who have stood by him in good report and evil report, are seeking to do him honor—be passed by with neglect here in the South! What will be its moral effect hereafter? In the first place, what will be its immediate effects on the friends of the compromise—the supporters of the fugitive slave law in the North? Will they feel themselves particularly called upon to rise up early and sit up late, in order to do battle for this fugitive slave law against all the devices of its enemies—when the South, for whose benefit it was enacted, and for whose benefit it is carried out, takes *no step forward* to meet the man who has done more to give this law abiding constitutional efficiency than all other men? Will they not grow indifferent and lukewarm? Most certainly they will. But this is not all. When some emergency shall hereafter arise; when, perhaps, this very slave question shall again be agitated; when the repeal of the fugitive slave act shall be urged—the very act which requires a greater veneration for existing law than



all others to carry it into execution in the midst of the free States—that act, which in its practical operation on the real interests of the South, is of more consequence than all the other questions pertaining to that subject; I say, when some such crisis shall again come, where will the man be found who will be willing to stem the torrent of prejudice at home, and yet know or believe that he will find no just appreciation, no public acknowledgment of his services amongst those for whom he has hazarded his domestic popularity? Where is the future statesman, who, with the history of Daniel Webster before him (if unfortunately such neglect of Mr. Webster shall ever be matter of history) will risk his personal comfort and good name among his neighbors and kinsfolk for the benefit of those who will not thank him for it when it is done? No such man will ever be found. It is against human nature to expect it. It is against all experience to hope for it. And what will be the result? Will it not be *sectional* feeling, *sectional* action, *sectional* parties; and will not the consequence of that be *sectional measures*, and in the end a dissolution of the Union? Such we fear will be the consequence, if we here, in the South, fail to manifest our appreciation of such services as Mr. Webster has rendered. *We* know that in fact a proper feeling *does* exist, and that the neglect is only apparent. *We* know that no man stands better in the estimation of all union-loving men in the South than Mr. Webster. Yet our Northern friends do *not* know it. They have had no good ground to *suppose* it. The appearance of things is *against* it. And yet in all practical consequences, the *appearance* is as fatal as the reality. And whether real or apparent, its moral influence, and its practical consequence hereafter, is as much to be deplored, and as earnestly to be struggled against, as any event that could well be imagined.

Sir, it is the *apprehension*, whether fanciful or real, that Northern men who are free from the shackles of mere local opinion, and are national in their views, looking to the *whole* country in their measures, are nevertheless to be rejected by Southern men because, forsooth, on certain subjects which are *local to them*, such Northern statesmen may not go so far as they do. These local ideas, these narrow and confined notions of public policy, would, if generally acted on, ruin any free government extending over such a space of territory as ours. Our only safety on questions of such vital interest is for opposing opinions to extend through all sections of the country. The greatest safety for the constitutional rights of the South, on the subject of slavery, is the existence of a party in the free soil States who are determined to *abide* by the provisions of the Constitution.

I repeat then that nothing will tend more to put down, and keep down hereafter, a conservative and constitutional and national spirit in the North than the belief that Northern statesmen of that character are not supported by the South. And nothing

would more largely contribute to maintain, to *perpetuate* a party in the North, always true to the constitutional rights of the South, than seeing the Southern Whig party coming up in one solid phalanx to the support, for the Presidency, of the great Northern Champion of the true principles of the American Constitution. Let us do what we can to bring about this event. Let us do what we can to avert the impending danger. Let us do what we can to raise the man whom we venerate to the highest office of the Republic, not simply because he deserves it and more than deserves it, but because we shall thus be serving the best interest of our whole country, and accomplishing something for the perpetuity of this glorious Union.

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